

A THOUGHT FROM GURBANI

True the world is as hard as steel
For the stubborn and self-willed folly,
But, through the might of the Word
The steel can be digested.

—Guru Nanak Dev

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TWO YEARS

Present Akali-Janta coalition ministry in Punjab, headed by Sardar Parkash Singh Badal, has set up a new record in longevity; it has completed two years this week, which is much more than the life-span of previous three Akali ministries—two led by Sardar Gurnam Singh and one by Sardar Badal himself. Another biggest achievement is the shift in development emphasis from towns to villages where 85 percent of people live. Not an easy period it has been, Janta partners, who, for all practical purposes, are old Jan Sanghis in Punjab, have been behaving much better this time, perhaps wised by the previous disasters which their ultimatums in 1970-71 brought upon them; now they realise that any temptation to get concessions at pistol-point is self-defeating. But, on the other hand, mumblings and rumblings in Akali hierarchy have continued with more din and periodicity; Sardar Badal was forced to dismiss his Education Minister Sukhjinder Singh sometime ago, and only recently he fought a pitched battle to save Revenue Minister Jiwan Singh Umranganal from being expelled from the party. Despite various crises, fortunately, the top trio, the other two being Shiromani Akali Dal President Jagdev Singh Talwandi and SGPC President Gurcharan Singh Tohra, have managed to reach compromises and pull on as a team, though somewhat disjointed.

Elections to SGPC and 90 municipal committees, which had been delayed for nine years by Congress regimes, were held this year, thereby giving the people the right to choose their representatives. Coupled with the great leap forward in development, it is a big feather in Sardar Badal's turban. His attention has been glued to rural areas, increase in agricultural production and generation of power, Punjab's present per capita consumption of power is 373 units as against all-India average of 154 units. During the last two years, wheat production has increased by 20 percent and paddy production by 76 percent; area reclaimed for cultivation has risen by 486 percent; electricity rates, on basis of a tube-well's horsepower as well as metered, have been reduced by 34 percent; 759 kilometers of water channels and 7,200 kilometers of water courses have been lined; 217 villages have been provided with potable water as against 1,500 during the previous 24 years. And when the rural integrated development programme, with an outlay of Rs. 302 crores, has been fully implemented by 1982, villages will be at par with cities in most of the modern amenities.

The biggest stride has been in the industrial field; on cards are six spinning mills, two sugar mills, seven paper mills and one maize product factory. Another notable feature has been the expansion of health facilities;

GURU AMARDAS

Contribution for edification of the faith

By : Gyani Brahma Singh, Ajmer

Baabaanyean Kahaaneyan put saput krein. (Slok M.3 (957))

The faithful progeny narrates the precious tales of their elders.

This is how Guru Amardas, the third Nanak, whose quincenary we are celebrating since May 11, 1979, sanctions and sanctifies the occasioning of such events with his own hallowed pen. This is how we keep alive the sacred memory of the unforgettable and precious deeds wrought by our worthy elders and trail-blazers in every walk of life, much more in the field of religion building, moral rearmament and social upliftment.

It has greater relevance to the present generation to contribute their requisite potential to keep their religious studies in schools and colleges. It also concerns industrialisation and materialism that wean the younger generations from the religious moorings and their true ancestral heritage.

The tales of the Sikh community were written more in blood than in ink, for the sword was busier than the pen in shaping the future course of the religion and the unbending state.

Such celebrations are valuable and genuine endeavours to accentuate and actualise inspiration and guidelines for the intellectuals and research-workers to plumb out hidden realities yet embedded deep into the dirt of superstitions and to sift gold from the dross metal for the guidance of the posterity.

The Sikh Gurus were fully conscious how despotism and the priest-craft had perniciously arrested the growth and even somewhere, killed splendid civilisations of the world. Both these maladies were still alive in Hindu society with their full force and potential and were eating into its very vitals. There was another cancerous disease of caste discriminations and untouchability. All their efforts and energies were directed to eliminate these evils with every means, precept, practice and performance at their disposal. Since the prevailing vicissitudes and environments were hostile from within and without both, envisioned results kept eschewing. Such celebrative efforts are wherewithals to enlighten our younger generation to guard against anti-Sikh elements.

During the past decade and a half, various international-level celebrations to highlight, promote and buttress the national building activities of the Sikh religion, have added much to the spiritual, educational and social upliftment of the Sikh community at large.

Guru's Life

Guru Amardas was born on May 5, 1479 at village Baserke, district Amritsar, in the house of Lala Tej Bhan, a Khatri of Bhalla sub-caste and a petty local trader. He was a strong Vaishnavist and would undertake pilgrimage to Ganga regularly every year. Once he met a Sadhu

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in addition to 46 25-bedded hospitals, 330 subsidiary health centres will have been opened in rural areas by March 1980. It is saddening that public response to Sardar Badal's repeated appeals for help in establishing these health centers in villages has not been encouraging, though there are thousands of multi-millionaires among Punjabis; five institutions and two individuals, which had agreed to donate one centre each, have still to send in their promised money; perhaps they have begun to shudder because of the plight of another earlier offer, of a huge haveli for this noble purpose, which remains to be translated into reality, though two years have since elapsed.

The ministry, all agree, is actuated by noble motives; Sardar Badal himself is very amiable, secular, and considerate to all. But bad name has been brought by a few MLAs who strut about as mini governors and local chief ministers; the recent police agitation had its origin in reported haughty behaviour of one MLA. Another grouse is that files do not move for months in some ministries, thereby delaying the implementation of well-meaning plans. If desired improvement is made in secretariat work and minions are restrained from throwing their weight about, the ministry image would register great improvement.

Guru Amar Das stressed elimination of caste-system and glorified the concept of 'Nam' and 'Sewa'

on his way and shared meals with him. The Sadhu was irked to find that Baba Amardas had not so far adopted a religious preceptor or Guru, a must for one's spiritual redemption from human metempsychosis. This perturbed Baba Amardas innerly and he became restive for his spiritual initiation from some religious preceptor of godly insight.

One early morning Baba Amardas heard Bibi Amro, daughter of Guru Angad, who was married to his brother's son, reciting Guru Nanak's hymns. This roused his inner latent spiritual consciousness and he entreated Bibi Amro to guide him to the house of Guru Angad, at Khadur on the bank of river Beas. He came to Khadur at the age of sixty and with intense devotion served Guru Angad selflessly, throwing away any vestige of vanity that he was his close and elderly relative. For over eleven years he fetched water early morning, braving all inclemencies of weather, hail or storm, heat or cold, for the Guru's ablutions at the ambrosial hours, three hours before the dawn, from the Beas river over a mile away.

It so happened that on one dark cold rainy winter night, he, on his way back with the chalice (gagar) full of water on his shoulder, tripped into a weaver's loom-pit; yet supporting the gagar unsplit. This created a panic in the weaver's family who were sleeping in the adjoining shed. On enquiry by the weaver as to what could be the disturbing agent at that odd hour, the weaver's wife in a mulish manner tauntingly retorted:—"Who could else be there but Amru nithawan (the refugeless Amardas), with no hour and place to rest."

The news of this ominous incident next morning incurred Guru's displeasure for the weaver's wife which earned her demeritation for undue insult to Baba Amardas. On the other hand, this intense devotion and self-effacing physical service earned Baba Amardas the prize of Guru Angad's spiritual as well as temporal successor. He was then 73 years old. He envisioned his Nirvan in his selfless service to his Guru and spared no pains to achieve it. He breathed his last on September 1, 1574 at the ripe age of 95 years.

Manjis

Guru Amardas established the institution of Sangats or Manjis—literally cot on which the Guru sat—with his great organisational foresight at various important centres of the country for the propagation of

the Guru Nanak's mission. Their incumbents would collect offerings from the locality for the Guru's langar, and to meet the other needs of the poor followers of the faith at the Guru's House. They would remit all collections, cash or kind, over and above the local requirements of the Sangats to the Guru's headquarters at Goindwal. These Manjis numbered about 22. Dr. H.R. Gupta says, "Guru Amardas never ate anything from the Guru's store-house but supported himself by small sums of money which he earned by trading in salt and oil in market".

This is a pointer to our present managers of the Gurdwara property and funds.



The holy place where Guru Amar Das lived in continuous remembrance of 'Nam'.

Baoli

Guru Amardas in order to cater to the need of drinking water by the residents of Goindwal, then seat of Sikh church, and the pilgrims who visited his house in great number from afar, got a Baoli, a well with steps, dug near his house. One had to climb down eighty four steps to reach the water level.

Dr. H.R. Gupta writes that Guru Amardas had declared that "whosoever attentively and reverently repeat the Japji on each step, would escape from the wanderings in the wombs of

eighty-four lakhs of living creatures".

Reforms—Prohibition

Guru Amardas was an eminent reformer of social evils and was a staunch prohibitionist. He condemned drinking in unequivocal terms.

Self-immolation

Guru Amardas vehemently inveighed against the prevalent pernicious Hindu practice of immolation by women along with their husbands at the time of latter's death and maintained that the love and remembrance must be real from the heart's core itself and not simply for the public demonstration ending their bodies on the pyres. He says:—

They are not the Satis who immolate themselves on the pyres of their husbands.

Real Satis are those who die when pain of separation of their husbands smites them.

O Foolish Brahmin: you have prostituted yourself in accepting remuneration at the wrong end from the girl's parents at the wedding solemnisation, forgetting that the bride is as good a daughter to you as to her own parents. You have badly wronged the sanctity of your human birth.

Caste Discrimination

Guru Amardas also denounced the pernicious and malevolent observance of caste distinction in the Hindu society. As a peaceful way to eliminate the evil, he would oblige with his darshans only when any visitor would first partake simple meals from his Langar.

The Change in Hereditary Guruship

A remarkable distinctive feature in the life of Guru Amardas was his agreement to the hereditary guruship after the request of his very devoted daughter, Bibi Bhani, who wrested a boon with a great physical devotional act for her father. This system began after Guru Ramdas, the fourth Sikh Guru and the son-in-law of Guru Amardas. Hitherto the Guruship was conferred, in preference to descendants, only by selection based on meritorious virtues and spiritual excellence, sense of selfless service and devotion and capability of the Guru's mission.

Poet of Great Eminence

Guru Amardas himself was a poet of great eminence and his spiritual utterances, hymn or Gurubani, enshrined in the Holy Guru Granth number 978, in 18 Ragas, as detailed below:—

Eighteen Ragas

Rag Sri—72; Majh—35; Gaur—39; Asa—48; Gujri—72; Behagra—33; Wadhans—61; Sorath—63; Dhanasri—9; Suhi—47; Bilawal—41; Ramkali—90; Maru—76; Bhairon—23; Basant—20; Sarang—26; Malar—43; Parbhati—9; Salok Waran ton wadhik—67; Salok under Kabir—1; Saloks under Farid—3; Total 978—(Bani Beora.)

Noteworthy and Prominent Contribution

His most noteworthy and prominent contribution, Bani is Anand Bliss or Beatitude—comprising 40 stanzas under Rag Ramkali, steeped in instructive guidance for a man as to how he is required to live in this mundane ephemeral existence for his spiritual evolution and to build and forge his personality under the crushing impact of Maya—illusion and ignorance—and to face his Maker squarely with smiling face on return to His Court after departure from his transitory stay here.

Brahminical Priesthood

Guru Amardas was also most critical of the brahminical priesthood fleecing and accepting remuneration at the solemnisation of weddings from the brides' parents. He says:—